

Let's Get Social

Organizations are increasingly looking to social media professionals to promote their brands and engage audiences.

Josh Le went to college to study zoology, knowing he wanted to work with animals in a conservation-related field. He soon realized his talents were in marketing, especially communicating via social media.

Today the 2011 University of Minnesota business management and marketing graduate manages Minnesota Zoo's Facebook page, Twitter account and photo-sharing social network Instagram.

and directing people to videos, such as one showing the zoo's tiger cubs playing with a jack-o-lantern for Halloween.

"Social media is becoming such a large part of organizations' marketing strategies," said Le, Minnesota Zoo's social media and marketing coordinator. "Many organizations will have to hire their own full-time social media professionals if they haven't already in order to stay in the game."

like community manager, social media strategist and social networking analyst.

The need for organizations to promote their brands and engage audiences online may be a silver lining for tech- and marketing-savvy recent graduates who have been hit hard by the recession and face high unemployment and underemployment.

Online job site CareerBuilder reported that in 2012 the occupation of social media manager grew 48 percent in year-over-year job listings. Its 2012 mid-year jobs survey found 16 percent of companies have created social media positions that didn't exist five years ago.

Bill Von Bank, Minnesota Zoo's director of sales and marketing, created in 2009 the position now held by Le after first researching and writing a position description because the hybrid social media and traditional marketing job didn't seem to exist in state government.

"[Social media] could be a full-time job," he said. "It's grown to be that important to us." The zoo has nearly 55,000



PHOTO BY JUDY PARKER

JOSH LE, Minnesota Zoo

He's answering questions via Twitter (how much does a bison weigh?), encouraging Facebook visitors to help name zoo animals

These positions often call for backgrounds in marketing, communications or public relations and have job titles

Facebook fans and 11,400 Twitter followers — a jump of 25,000 fans and 3,000 followers since April when Le was hired. Meanwhile, the zoo had record attendance in fiscal year 2012, and visits during the last quarter exceeded the zoo's goal by 50,000.

While you won't find specific Minnesota labor market statistics on social media jobs, many public relations positions require these skills. Minnesota firms employ nearly 5,000 public relations professionals and pay average wages ranging from \$28.61 per hour for specialists to \$52.81 per hour for managers.

The national Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts media and communications occupations will grow 13 percent from 2010 to 2020 largely because of the demand for public relations specialists and growth in social media. Employment of public relations professionals alone is expected to grow 23 percent. Job trends in Minnesota are comparable.

"There's no entity on the planet that doesn't need people who can communicate," said Kathleen Hansen, director of undergraduate studies at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication. "It's never been a better time to study how to communicate with audiences. Students understand that."

The school — which offers a popular journalism major to prepare students for journalism, advertising and public relations careers — has significantly revised its curriculum to meet employer demand for graduates with social media skills. This spring it will offer "Digital Media for Strategic Communication," a new course teaching how to interpret web usage data and create content to increase website traffic.

It's an exciting time for students as they invent the future of communication, said Hansen, a professor of more than 30 years, who admits she has to remind concerned parents their children are attending a journalism and mass communication program rather than a school of newspapers. "It's the most exciting, fascinating era I can think of."

Recent graduates include a multimedia producer for the Star Tribune, a journalism program manager at Facebook, a technical producer for advertising at Google and an e-commerce copywriter for apparel brand GUESS?.

Robert Filipczak is someone who didn't plan for a social media career when he graduated with an English degree in 1984 and pursued work in journalism and marketing. After being laid off by a Fortune 500 company during the recession, Filipczak was



BILL VON BANK
Minnesota Zoo



KATHLEEN HANSEN
University of Minnesota



NICK GRZECHOWIAK
Real Avid

hired in 2009 to write for and maintain the Minnesota Department of Transportation's website. Then one day he was



PHOTO BY JUDY PARKER

ROBERT FILIPCZAK
MnDOT

asked to create a department Facebook page.

Today that page has nearly 4,000 fans, and he uses Facebook and Twitter to share road condition reports, construction updates and driving tips.

"Facebook and Twitter give us a whole new avenue to spread information in fast and in reliable ways," said Filipczak, MnDOT's social media coordinator. "We're reaching the right people and they spread our word better than we do."

Besides teaching himself to create and manage Facebook and Twitter accounts for his organization, Filipczak has

learned to shoot and edit online videos that attract thousands of viewers. The most popular ones have highlighted construction of the Hastings bridge and the benefits of zipper merging in construction zones.

Filipczak said people are interested in this information, not merely to monitor government but because traffic and roads affect their lives.

Nick Grzechowiak, marketing manager at Real Avid in Plymouth, knows the importance of connecting with an audience online. In January 2012, the maker of tools for hunters had 444 Facebook fans.

In less than a year, the company has nearly 43,000 fans and was among six Twin Cities firms competing nationally in Social Madness — a contest where organizations vie for the greatest social influence determined by LinkedIn connections, Facebook activity and Twitter followers. Real Avid won the regional championship for small companies.

"I built a multi-month social plan for Real Avid prior to the start of Social Madness," said Grzechowiak, who has a business degree and believes successful social media is based on strategy and relationships. "It contained week-by-week content and campaigns that were designed to

spike traffic at key times in the competition. When the voting was wrapping up in each round, I had a campaign ready to launch that would affect our traffic, likes and engagement."

Grzechowiak worked to engage hunters online after studying the culture, products and influencers in the market. "The key to any social campaign is creating content that the audience connects with."

A recent campaign spotlighting the hunting tradition encouraged Real Avid's Facebook visitors to post photos of their young hunters and shooters. A prize was offered for the best photo.

Creating valuable content, writing in an authentic voice and keeping up with technology are vital skills for social media professionals. But maturity is also important.

A number of corporations have faced embarrassing incidents after hiring recent graduates, said Jennifer Kane, principal of Kane Consulting, a Twin Cities firm that helps businesses use social media.

She referred to a Red Cross staffer who tweeted about beer using the organization's Twitter account and a KitchenAid employee who slammed President Obama during a debate using the company's Twitter account.

“When a person who doesn’t have the maturity sits on the front lines, it can cause big problems,” she said. “It’s not an entry-level position. You have to be really savvy about PR, how a company works and politics. That person is really in the spotlight and has to juggle a lot of time-sensitive information. It’s a job that never stops.”

Kane, who is developing curriculum for St. Paul-based Concordia University’s social media certificate program, encourages job seekers to use social media tools to show they can manage their own Facebook and Twitter accounts. “It’s pretty hard to get a community manager job without a blog.”

She also sees a need for social media professionals to have more analytical skills and backgrounds in statistics and behavioral psychology to better understand all the data from online activity so digital marketing can be used more effectively and its return on investment better understood.

It’s super fun to teach someone to tweet, but the heavy lifting means understanding causation, correlation, measurement, return on investment and traffic patterns. “I don’t think those people exist yet, and I’m not sure the jobs are there for them, but they will be,” said Kane, who was among the 2009 Twin Cities Top 10 Titans in Social Media.



CONTRIBUTED

JENNIFER KANE
Kane Consulting

Creating Your Brand

By Rachel Vilsack

Many items you buy — and even stores — have a brand identity that makes them recognizable to consumers. Branding is how companies stand out from one another. A brand might include a logo or image, but it also must evoke a consistent message, like a quality or feeling.

The concept of branding relates to the job search process, too. Job seekers try to stand out from their competition by displaying certain qualities — like skills and experience — or personal achievements and successes. Just like a company, job seekers are trying to sell something to an employer.

Social networking sites like LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter are one way job seekers can create a brand. In fact, 88 percent of job seekers have an online profile on at least one of these sites, according to the Jobvite 2012 Social Job Seeker Survey. A personal website or blog also may be part of a brand and can showcase writing and other skills essential for social media positions.

Job seekers aren’t the only ones making a connection to possible employers on social networking sites. Nearly all recruiters (92 percent) that participated in Jobvite’s 2012 Social Recruitment Survey use or plan to use social media for recruiting this year. Three out of four recruiters surveyed hired candidates through social networks and found the quality of candidates to be higher since implementing social recruiting.

Many employers perform an Internet search to screen job candidates, so an effective online persona that strengthens your brand could make you stand out, including references to volunteering and membership in professional organizations.


Of course, not all online behavior affects a candidate positively. Drug and alcohol references, profanity, and even spelling and grammar errors in posts or tweets create a bad impression about a potential job candidate.

While social networking doesn’t take the place of face-to-face networking, job seekers might be missing out on some potential contacts and opportunities to connect with job openings if they are not making use of these tools.



In addition to staying active online, job seekers should be creative when searching for social media jobs. Recent Minnesota job openings requiring these skills included positions for communications specialists, media analysts, product marketing managers, digital marketing specialists and community engagement specialists.

“Anyone who wants a social media career definitely needs to research it,” Le said. “It’s not enough to have a Facebook page. You still need to know what information is best to share. You definitely still need to have a strong background in marketing and public relations to be successful in social media marketing. And you have to be really flexible. Social media is

constantly changing. Rolling with the changes and keeping up with all the trends is really big. It’s the only way your brand is going to stay relevant.” 

Places to Learn More

Grow, www.businessesgrow.com/blog

Mashable, <http://mashable.com>

Social Media Jobs Salary Guide from Onward Search, www.onwardsearch.com/Social-Media-Salaries

Social Media Today, <http://socialmediatoday.com>

Some Minnesota Organizations for Social Media Professionals

Minnesota Chapter of Business Marketing Association, <http://bit.ly/Rz431r>

Minnesota Interactive Marketing Association, www.mima.org

Minnesota Public Relations Society of America, www.mnprsa.com

Social Media Breakfast Minneapolis/St. Paul, <http://smbmsp.org>

